



Feeble end to season as Hatters surrender

LUTON waved goodbye to the 2002/2003 season with this gutless display at the County Ground.

They were completely devoid of ideas in attack, other than long balls to Steve Howard as under-par Hatters surrendered an early lead.

Tony Thorpe put them ahead on the half-hour mark but two goals in two minutes triggered a wholesale surrender and eighth spot to last year's arch rivals Plymouth Argyle.

For the last game of the season, manager Joe Kinnear made four changes from the side that drew 1-1 with Stockport County.

There was to be no return to the County Ground for ex-Robins favourite Sol Davis, serving a one-match ban. Alan Kimble came in at left back and alongside him in defence David Bayliss was in for the injured Chris Willmott.

After impressing as a second half substitute last Saturday, Ahmet Brkovic was rewarded with a place on the left wing and Tony Thorpe took over from Carl Griffiths up front.

With both teams having nothing significant to play for, the Hatters came out the more lively in the opening exchanges.

In the ninth minute, Howard broke through the middle and attempted to beat goalkeeper Bart Griemink from 30 yards out with a chip, when a pass to the onrushing Matthew Spring would have been a better option.

No-one could blame the big striker for having a go as one more goal would equal last season's tally of 24 goals.

After that early chance, it was all Swindon and rookie goalkeeper Robert Beckwith kept the Robins at bay.

On 27 minutes pacy French winger Eric Sabin chased on to a through ball but Beckwith bravely dived at his feet.

Luton survived that scare to take an undeserved lead on 30 minutes. The home side looked to have cleared their lines from a free kick but the ball was planted back in the penalty area by Brkovic.

He found Emmerson Boyce at the far post. The right back headed across goal for Thorpe, whose diving header saw him poach his 16th of the season.

The lead lasted little more than ten minutes, when mounting Swindon pressure paid off.

Spring headed clear from a corner and there looked to be no danger when midfielder Stefan Miglioranzi teed up the ball from 35 yards. The Italian connected



■ Young goalkeeper Robert Beckwith fails to hold this Sam Parkin header as Swindon took the lead at the County Ground yesterday

beautifully and the ball flew into the top left hand corner for one of the goals of the season on 41 minutes.

A minute later a free kick from defender Junior Lewis was met by Sam Parkin in the box. His powerful close range header squirmed through Beckwith's hands.

No blame could be attached to the young goalkeeper, who did well to even get a hand to such an accurate finish.

As the second half kicked off and with nothing to lose, Kinnear switched to a 4-3-3 formation, surprisingly taking off Brkovic, who had given a good account of himself up until a 42nd minute booking. He was replaced by Adrian Forbes, who lined up alongside Howard and Thorpe.

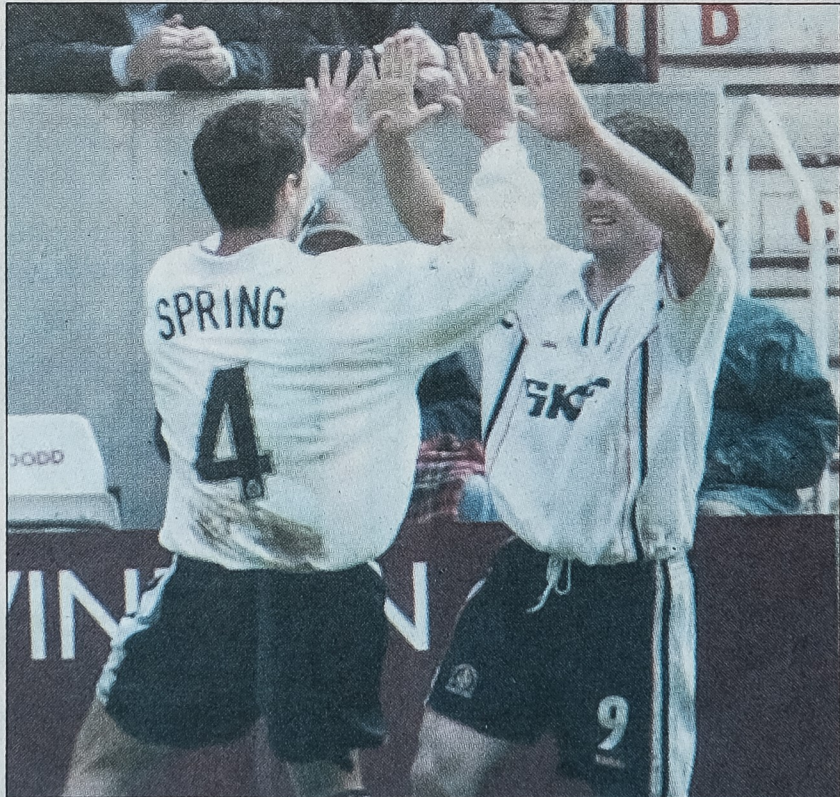
The tactical switch, rather than making them a more potent force, had the effect of making the Hatters look more vulnerable in defence.

Luton's backline was beaten time and again by Swindon's pacy attackers led by an electric by Sabin.

It was the Frenchman's cross that nearly led to a third. Nicholls dithered with a clearance in his own box and the ball fell to Matthew Heywood five yards out with the goal at his mercy. Fortunately the midfielder crashed his shot against the crossbar.

Instead of pressing on to get the point needed to secure eighth place, the Hatters seemed to be dreaming of their summer break.

They had just the second-half chance on 77 minutes. Another long ball fell for Thorpe, who escaped the clutches of his marker but the ball would not drop. He ended up prodding a tame shot to the 'keeper.



■ Matthew Spring is the first to celebrate with Hatters goalscorer Tony Thorpe after the diving header (below) put the Hatters ahead at Swindon



MATCH FACTS



Luton Town (4-4-2): Beckwith; Boyce (Foley 83m), Neilson, Bayliss, Kimble; Hughes, Nicholls, Spring (Skelton 84), Brkovic (Forbes 46); Howard, Thorpe
Subs not used: Brill, Okai

Referee: Andy Penn (West Midlands)

GOALSCORERS:

Swindon: Miglioranzi (41), Parkin (42)
Luton: Thorpe (30)

SHOTS ON TARGET

Swindon: 6
Luton: 5

SHOTS OFF TARGET

Swindon: 6
Luton: 5

CORNERS

Swindon: 7
Luton: 4

OFFSIDE

Swindon: 0
Luton: 4

BOOKINGS

Swindon: Sabin (73), Robinson (79)
Luton: Nicholls (36), Brkovic (42), Bayliss (88m)

ATTENDANCE: 6,455

HATTERS STAR MAN: TONY THORPE

At least he scored in a dreadful team display

Division Two results

Blackpool	1	Chesterfield	1
Brentford	1	Peterborough	1
Bristol City	2	Port Vale	0
Colchester	0	QPR	1
Crewe	1	Cardiff	1
Huddersfield	1	Oldham	1
Mansfield	2	Northampton	1
Notts County	1	Cheltenham	0
Plymouth	1	Wycombe	0
Stockport	2	Tranmere	3
Swindon	2	LUTON	1
Wigan	1	Barnsley	0

How they stand

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wigan	46	29	13	4	68	25	100
Crewe	46	25	11	10	76	40	86
Bristol City	46	24	11	11	79	48	83
QPR	46	24	11	11	69	45	83
Oldham	46	22	16	8	68	38	82
Cardiff	46	23	12	11	68	43	81
Tranmere	46	23	11	12	66	57	80
Plymouth	46	17	14	15	63	52	65
Luton	46	17	14	15	67	62	65
Swindon	46	16	12	18	59	63	60
Peterborough	46	14	16	16	51	54	58
Colchester	46	14	16	16	52	56	58
Blackpool	46	15	13	18	56	64	58
Stockport	46	15	10	21	65	70	55
Notts County	46	13	16	17	62	70	55
Brentford	46	14	12	20	47	56	54
Port Vale	46	14	11	21	54	70	53
Wycombe	46	13	13	20	59	66	52
Barnsley	46	13	13	20	51	64	52
Chesterfield	46	14	8	24	43	73	50
Cheltenham	46	10	18	18	53	68	48
Huddersfield	46	11	12	23	39	61	45
Mansfield	46	12	8	26	66	47	44
Northampton	46	10	9	27	40	79	39